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NOTES ON CHIRICAHUA APACHE CULTURE

1. SUPERNATURAL POWER AND THE SHAMAN[1]

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THE basic concept of Chiricahua religion is that of diffuse supernatural power. This force floods the universe and renders even ostensibly inanimate objects potentially animate. However, in order to become effective, it must "work through" humankind. Its method is to utilize the animals, plants, natural forces, and inanimate objects familiar to the Chiricahua, as channels by means of which to get in contact with man. After this contact has been made, the power appears in personified guise and offers a ceremony or supernatural aid to the person approached. The variety of channels through which supernatural power can "speak" to the Chiricahua is suggested in these quotations from informants:

[1] These notes are an organization of source material which limitations of space made it impossible to include in the writer's Chiricahua ethnology, *An Apache Life-Way*, Chicago, 1941. It is hoped that they will add detail, nuance, and example to the data of that volume. While this article and others to follow in this series are written to be read as separate contributions, for the benefit of students of the Indians of the Southwest or those who wish to find additional material relating to the same general topics, cross-references to pages of the *Life-Way* on which comparable information appears are given in parentheses at the conclusion of a discussion of a point.

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756 778 787 825 A real shaman is one who considers that something talks to him, that he has a ceremony through sun, moon, star, lightning, or cyclone. I hear many say this. I said to one woman, "I hear you are a shaman." "Yes," she said, "the horse gives me power to do supernatural things. The one who speaks to me, the horse, lays down the rules." Some people, when they say "the one who speaks to me," may be talking of the spider, the deer, or the coyote. Geronimo sang coyote songs and had curing power from Coyote.

778 825 787 Power is obtained from all the different animals and birds, from the coyote, cattle, horse, and other things. They all have songs and they all have ceremonies. The Chiricahua get power from Crow, Eagle, Humming Bird, Cardinal, and other birds too. They used to say that power talked to them all the time, but you don't hear that so much now. Wolf power makes you strong. Bear power makes you strong too. Some get power from the sun and moon also. When you get it from these you can see all over the world, they say. These shine on everything in the world; that's why. And Morning Star and Evening Star are great things too, they say.

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In the old times there were those who believed they had power from the stars, moon, sun, wind, and clouds. Many believed that these are the best source of power. People can get power [782] from the whirlwind too; the whirlwind has life. All these things are prayed to, and pollen is thrown to them by those who know them. All the stars that are recognized are thought of as personalities, embodying someone who has supernatural power.

821 825 778 A person can get power from the snake, deer, eagle, hawks, and insects with a stinger. Power also comes from the sun, moon, stars, wind, thunder, and Mountain People, and even from small animals and bugs and ants.

Power can come from lightning, thunder, horse, bear, fox, snake, wind, sun, star, rain, Water Monster, Controller of Water, eagle, crow, insects, owl, and everything you can think of.

Sometimes the power takes the form of an animal . . . a horse, a deer, an antelope, a bear, or any other animal that has four legs, such as a coyote. The deer has life; the horse has life . . .

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(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 200–207.)

Supernatural power, at least supernatural power of the beneficent kind, may offer those to whom it appears a means of curing the sick, of exposing sorcerers, of finding lost objects, of determining the whereabouts of the enemy, or of succeeding in ventures of warfare, raid, and the hunt. In other words, Chiricahua religion is practical rather than mystical in its primary aims. It is concerned with physical well-being, material abundance, and safety rather than with salvation or morality. This does not mean that the Chiricahua Apache are indifferent to standards of conduct. They have a well-defined moral code and many of its provisions are strict and lofty. Their method of maintaining it, however, is through social understandings, sanctions, and public opinion rather than by reference to religion. Man's blunders in personal or social relations may be remiss and reprehensible but they are not often considered the concern of the supernaturals.

One day a missionary gave a talk on temperance. He said it was a sin to eat too much or to drink too much. The Chiricahua gathered together after the sermon and talked. They were saying, "What's the matter with that fellow? What's he talking about?" There is nothing in our religion that has this idea. They couldn't understand it.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 214–216.)

The reality for the Chiricahua of supernatural power or of the vision experience which ends in the acquisition of a ceremony must not be underestimated. Even the younger person who is today rather indifferent about obtaining a ceremony or a guardian spirit for himself is positive about the validity of the experiences of the older, more religiously motivated generation.

These men really have power. Take my father: he's an old man now and they are taking care of him at the hospital, but he did a lot of good in his day. Men like that really see things. They don't just imagine it. The animals and powers come

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787 right up to them and talk. You and I can't see it or hear it,
778 but they can. Like in one ceremony I saw: the shaman said in one place, "Everything is light. I see a big light." He saw it, but it was a pitch-dark night, and we couldn't see a thing.

771 The Chiricahua, like all people who have developed a religious
778 system, have had, in spite of the religious safeguards which they
758 affirm, to recognize the existence of failure, danger, death, and
754 evil. They account for them by a theory of the plasticity and
182 duality of power. Thus hateful individuals may employ complacent power for malevolent rather than kindly ends. Or the personified source of the power may itself be represented as malicious and may lead weak-willed shamans into dubious practices by deceit, threats, and promises. Therefore it is necessary to be constantly wary of cleverly veiled evil power (sorcery) and of ceremonialists (witches) who are not above using their rituals to harm, betray, or cause illness. Consequently, a substantial part [796] of Chiricahua ceremonialism, perhaps its most dramatic aspect, is the contest with supernatural power between the shamans and the sorcerers. Sometimes a shaman who controls one type of supernatural power, who has been granted a ceremony from a natural force or a heavenly body, for instance, may be suspicious of rituals from contrasting sources, such as the animals of the earth. These views are exemplified in the excerpts which follow:

I came to know that power is not good or bad of itself. It is just power. It can be used for good or evil. It all depends on the [796] person who has it. Look at the power from the Mountain [532] People. (The Mountain People are mountain-dwelling super- [535] naturals who guard the Chiricahua and their territory from harm. They are impersonated by masked dancers.) The [881] Mountain People are good. They help the Chiricahua. We have them at the girl's puberty rite. But they can, to the Chiricahua mind, be used for evil too. A good many people think X. is a witch and uses Mountain Spirit power for evil. A good many people will not go through that Mountain Spirit ceremony of his. When it is going on, they get pretty far in the back; they are taking no chances. But there are others who think it is all right, who go through with it and consider X. a shaman.

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There are many kinds of ceremonies, but the real ceremonies are those which deal with the heavenly bodies and forces, like lightning. Ceremonies that pertain to this earth are false, and there is too much of a penalty in holding on to them. They make you pay out something in the end. I consider all ceremonies like those coming from Bear and Horse to be of this earth. Evil power uses the animal as an instrument and gives visions through it. To have an animal appear to a man and speak with him is not a good way. I think that evil represents itself through these animals. The powers of earth are easily learned by any kind of a person; these powers are not particular. [787]

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 208–9.)

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Power can be obtained through a personal supernatural experience or, once obtained in this way, it can be perpetuated by the process of instruction and transfer.

A person who wants power does not have to go out alone, fast, or torture himself to induce the power to speak to him. The power speaks to him without any effort on his part. Or this person might ask a shaman to teach him his ceremony. He may get friendly with a shaman and then ask him if he will teach him his songs. Then the shaman "gives" him the songs and prayers. Or someone with power may offer to teach that power to him. These are the three common ways a man might get power. [424]

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The transfer of a ceremony is by no means a mechanical matter only. It can be accomplished only with the approval and assistance of the power source concerned.

A ceremony is usually transferred to a son, daughter, or other close relative. But the power has to be consulted before the transfer of a ceremony. If power is satisfied, it is all right. If the person isn't fit for it, the power refuses. This is shown by the fact that the man cannot learn the songs and keep in mind what to do. If the power is willing to have the transfer made, the man will learn the ceremony in less than four days.

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Often a shaman, when he is very old, becomes eager to have his

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796 424 son or other close relative learn and carry on his ritual. Not infrequently, however, these kinsmen are uninterested in the rite, and a more ardent candidate is found among outsiders.

My father has been begging my brother to take it (the father's ceremony). My brother has been taking it (over) a little; he has been practicing with the old man and helping him. The old man begged E. (another son) and me to do it too. . . . The old man wants us to take over his ceremony. He said to [435] us, "I want you boys to have it. All you'll have to give me is one steer. I paid a lot more for it when I got it myself."

796 424 787 535 532 [755] I tried to give it (a masked dancer ceremony) to my grandsons, but they didn't want it. They didn't care much for it. Then E. was sick. He appealed to me for help. He asked if the Mountain Spirits could help him in any way. I told him, "Act as one of my masked dancers and perhaps it will help you." He danced and got well. Then later Mountain Spirits appeared to E. in a dream. They were dressed and designed like my masked dancers. He told me about it. I knew what it was for. I told him, "Well, you can use the outfits with me and carry the ceremony on." Then E. saw in a vision that the Mountain People wanted him to have the ceremony, so I turned it over to him. He took it very seriously. He now knows the songs and has the right to carry on the ceremony. It took him four days to learn it. He learned the songs thoroughly again in a dream after he was taught them by me. He has full rights now. Both he and I have the (masked dancer) outfits now; both of us use them. We do not make two sets of masked dancers but share in the making of one set. But he could do it all alone now. I do not even have to be present.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 210–11.)

787 798 [796] When a ceremony is acquired through a personal supernatural experience, it is the power or power source that usually takes the initiative, though the individual approached has the right to reject the offer if he sees fit. This is apparent from the following discussion of the manner in which a young man is prepared for a vision experience.

Perhaps some day you will be out alone. Something will talk to

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you. If you see that it is a real power, take it. If it is earthly and little, don't take it. It will be of great use to you if it is a real power. 787 778

The instructor will try to make him see how to tell what is great and what is little. He will say, "Such a power spoke to me when I was young, but it was nothing; I did not take it. But another power spoke to me and it was great." Yet the young man has to decide for himself whether a power is worth while when he hears something, for nobody can tell for another person whether what has spoken to him has worthwhile power or not.

Nor can a power grant be induced by desire or special modes of action. The ways of power and its reasons for preferring some of the persons it approaches are sometimes inexplicable.

It's just like this. There is an English-speaking Indian here. He grows long hair and tries to live the way we did in the old days. He has been carrying turquoise around and everything. He wants to be a big man in ceremonies, that's why. But he doesn't amount to anything. [156]

We can't do anything about it by ourselves, you and I. We might not believe what some others claim about their experiences. We might be sitting here saying, "It's all a lie." Then a spirit might talk to us. Then we'd believe. We'd say, "Well, it happened all right." And we'd have to believe it. We might not believe some man who claims that something spoke to him, and he might be telling the truth. You've got to watch and see which man's power is good.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 202–3.)

Once an understanding is achieved between a power source and a shaman, the Chiricahua derives many benefits. One of these advantages is that the power often acts as a guardian spirit to warn of dangers or to advise concerning undertakings. A shaman seldom initiates anything important without praying and singing to his power and waiting for a sign or a response. This, for example, is the pledge a power source made to a shaman at the time their association began: 756 787 778 [782]

"Live around here. I will be around here with your daughter. One day when you go to war I will be by your side, but you won't see me. If you see a crow fly, it will be I. If you see a coyote, it will be I. If you want to go to war or on a raid, come here first and even if I am not here, talk, and I will be here. Tell me where you are going and ask my advice. Go home. The next day I will draw a picture of what you will get. I will draw deer tracks, horse tracks, and show where you are going to get them. If you see cattle or horse tracks, it means you will get plenty."

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 214.)

Immunity from some of the ordinary perils is another of the benefits which usually accompanies shamanism.

Some men use hawk feathers for arrows, but some are afraid. You have to know power to do it. Only a hawk shaman would do it. It's the same with the buzzard. Not everybody could use the feathers. Formerly the Chiricahua could get very sick from the buzzard.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 214.)

The principal function and attribute of the possessor of a power grant, however, is to cure sickness, and the Chiricahua who is able to practice an effective curing ceremony earns respect and even riches.

When I was a boy, a good shaman was highly respected. These are the ones who are known to have kind hearts and that nobody calls witches. A good shaman is wealthy, for he's out curing and everybody gives him something for his cures.

If sickness strikes and special knowledge and ceremony are required, a shaman is hired. It is accepted that he or one of his fellow ceremonialists will, through the cooperation of supernatural power, learn the cause of the difficulty and the proper course of action. The service of supernatural power may range from producing a simple herbal remedy to revealing the identity of a sorcerer.

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When anybody gets sick, they dig up herbs and give them to him. If he doesn't get better, they get a shaman to sing for him. If this doesn't help, they get a wiser man and he finds out what is really wrong; he gets a vision of what medicine is needed, and he tells the family to go out and get the right herbs. If he sees a witch in his vision, they bring the witch to cure the man.

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How two shamans who had power from the same source and were jointly conducting a rite discovered the proper medicine to give a patient is told in one narrative.

They had to find out what was best to give to the one who was sick. So they performed their ceremony in this way. They put buckskin, white as snow, before them. Then they held feathers and said, "Now listen, all of you. We have asked what it is best to use. Listen and listen and wait and wait, and you will hear something coming; you will hear something falling." Then we heard it on the roof, and it dropped on the buckskin before them. "Now here's your medicine," they said. Then they asked their power how to give it, whether it should be ground up or what. They found this out from their power too. But I saw them fail in many cases too. I don't know why. It looks as though they should have been able to cure any disease, being as strong as that. But they failed sometimes. Maybe they gave up purposely.

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The belated attempt of one of these same practitioners to find a remedy which would stem an epidemic of influenza is described in another account.

Now he sang songs about different medicines. He sang about one herb and then another. There was no sign that any of these would help. Then he started on the trees. He got to juniper. Then he stopped. His power had showed him that juniper was good. "What kind of juniper?" he asked. His power told him to name the junipers. "Alligator bark juniper?" he asked. "No." "Rock juniper?" It was not right either. "One-seeded juniper?" "You've got it," said his power. He started another song. Right at the beginning he stopped. He nodded. "There are four," he said, "'slim medicine' (*Perezia wrightii*), sumac, piñon, and one-seeded juniper. The roots of the first two can be used and the needles of the last two.

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787 Use these and it won't hurt you." But death was around already and he didn't sing any more. My family got busy. We pounded up a whole sack of the needles of the one-seeded juniper, and others did it too.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 223.)

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778 Usually, however, it is enough if the shaman simply performs his ceremony as he has learned it from his power source; if he chants his prayers, sings his songs, and manipulates his sacred substances in the correct manner he may expect that the power source will be gratified and will intercede to restore the patient to health.

[158] P. went to see this boy who was a lunatic. They had to catch the boy every afternoon, for he had a fit and was a danger. After praying, P. made the cross and put pollen in the boy's mouth. When he started, the boy was tied hand and foot to the bed. P. sang the songs for him. After he had finished his ceremony, the boy was all right. He works now and is still well.

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778 The shaman feels the importance of his position and must protect the dignity of his power source as well. Therefore his services must be requested humbly and in a prescribed manner.

[551] When you need the help of a shaman you call his name (the personal name is used only in emergencies), plead with him, and put a cross of pollen on his foot. Then there is no question about it; he must help you.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 258.)

A successful shaman is paid liberally at the conclusion of a cure, but even before a rite may begin, ceremonial payment to the power source must be made.

His power always requires special things for a shaman to cure with, and you must have these ready. If you don't know what these are and don't want to ask him (some shamans don't like to say anything about what you must pay them), you must go to someone he has cured to find out what to give him when

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he comes. These articles have to be given to the shaman if the cure is to be a success. They are given before the ceremony really gets started. Pollen, turquoise, abalone, feathers, white shells, and a black-handled knife are among the objects which may be needed.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 259.)

Whether or not he expects all of them as ceremonial payment, the shaman has a variety of ritual paraphernalia and substances on hand to be used in the ceremony: some combination of pollen, eagle feathers, abalone, turquoise, unblemished buckskin, animal parts, baskets, designed clothing, specular iron ore, a carved and designed cane or staff, yellow ochre, various other paints, plants, and medicines. The attitude toward some of these sacred substances and objects and the manner in which they are used are detailed thus by informants:

In my ceremony I use tule pollen at sunrise. The next night I use piñon pollen. The third morning at sunrise I use pollen from pine. The fourth day at noon I use sunflower pollen. All shamans use pollen. It stands for life and health. In a ceremony I saw Geronimo perform, he used pollen to make signs to the directions and then put the pollen in the sick man's mouth. He made crosses of pollen on the man's head, chest, right shoulder, back, and left shoulder.

Abalone has life. It has lots of good. Everything good is in it. Many shamans use it. Many of them say that without it they cannot carry on their ceremonies. When it is real blue inside it is male. This is the most powerful kind. When it is not the good color, when it is greyish, it is female. For my ceremony I polish the outside and use the scrapings for medicine. It is good for any kind of pain anywhere. It is also a protection against witches. I put some in medicine to cure lightning sickness too.[2]

[2] It is interesting to note that while abalone shell contrasts with turquoise, the representative of the male principle in Chiricahua religion, and stands for the female principle, abalone which is bluish inside is called "male" and abalone which is pinkish or whitish is termed "female." Evidently the alternation in both instances is due to a color-sex association, blue for male and a light color (pink, white, grey) for female.

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756 778 [237] These staffs figure in ceremonies. The shaman is directed how to make them by his power. They may be decorated with feathers or with something pertaining to the ceremony of the one who makes it, perhaps a snake or lightning. They vary in size.

[787] A shaman can hear from the power through the turquoise and feather. When the shaman prays he uses the feather. If the feather raises itself, he knows the prayer is heard. If the turquoise moves, it is the same.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 260–61.)

756 755 796 784 [576] The shaman makes certain that any spectators at the ceremony he conducts are reverent and well-behaved. Not infrequently there are special obligations which remind the on-looker of the solemnity of the occasion. About these insistences, a younger, socially-minded Chiricahua explained:

> It was pretty hard for us younger people to attend. There are always restrictions on everyone who is there. For some ceremonies you can't leave before it is all over for that evening; for some you can't sleep. So we didn't care so much to be at these curing ceremonies. But we always went to the girl's puberty rite, for you could always have a good time there.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, p. 259.)

755 756 784 [778] [787] The source of power, speaking through the shaman, usually places some food or behavior restriction on the patient. Failure to observe this is construed as carelessness or levity in respect to the rite and is likely to lead to a relapse. Many of the failures to cure permanently are explained in this way. Some of the most common post-ritual restrictions are summarized in these statements:

> The shaman has his reasons. He doesn't always tell the patients why, but he tells them to keep the paint (which has been applied during the ceremony) on for so many days before taking it off.

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When a shaman finishes a curing ceremony over you, he gives you directions about things that you must not do or eat. . . . Restrictions that I have seen put on people are these: the person must not let anyone stand to the east of him; he must not let anyone cast a shadow on him; he must not eat meat from a cow's head; he must not eat liver; he must not eat bacon; if someone gives him a piece of fruit and it drops, he must not pick it up again and eat it.

If you are sick the shaman might tell you, "Don't let anyone stand to the east of you, in the way of the sun." Then you don't like it and tell anyone doing it to sit down. Some have a restriction that no one can stand over them; others that no one can stretch out his feet before them.

(*See also An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 265–266.)

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From what has already been described it is evident that, in the view of the Chiricahua Apache, the usefulness and success of the shaman are directly related to the rapport he establishes with the power which has chosen to "work through him." If his power is somehow alienated or angered, the ceremonialist will pray and sing his sacred songs in vain. Therefore a Chiricahua is extremely circumspect when referring to his power. An informant expressed some wonder that "the white man in his swearing uses things and people that he says he believes in and calls holy. When a Chiricahua swears, he mentions only things he fears and hates." In making decisions which involve his ceremony a shaman's power must be consulted. This is vividly revealed in the musings of the shaman who had misgivings over discussing details of ceremonial lore.

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It is a big thing to me. I'm afraid of it. Something is holding me back. I might put myself in trouble with the power . . . and today I feel that the power is holding on. I feel in my heart and mind that something is holding me back. I'm afraid. Tonight I am going to sing to my power. I am going to ask about the things that I have given (told) you. "Is it right to do that?" I am going to ask my power. I don't know what you are going to do with this (information) but Power will tell

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me about it. So tonight I will sing and talk to my power to find out whether it is all right to go on with it.

The lightest punishment for somehow offending the source of power is the loss of its cooperation and the voiding of the ceremony. Some Chiricahua fear misfortune and persecution by the power, in addition.

A person keeps his power by obeying his power source, by not leaving out anything. It is just as if you had men working under you; you like the man who does everything just so, but you turn out the man who doesn't carry out everything as you direct. If the mistake is not made intentionally the shaman and members of his family are not in danger, though.

When they have a ceremony, they always have to do it exactly right, and when they don't do it right, there is sickness or death in the family. I have noticed that if the rules are not followed just so, trouble comes,—a death or something. Power takes one of their family. That is why some people reject power when it is offered and want to remain as they are. There is a big penalty for not doing exactly what is laid down. If a shaman makes mistakes, says the prayers wrong, or something like that, he must repeat them.

(See also *An Apache Life-Way*, pp. 207–10.)

Normally, however, the Chiricahua shaman views his close association with his power source in a positive light. It provides him with a basis for appealing to supernatural power in time of emergency, for pleading with power, cajoling it, and even scolding it for non-performance of duty when it fails to heal or help.